

Message Text

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ACTION SPM-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4179

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E.O. 11652: N/A

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF POPULATION POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

REF: STATE 112325

1. COUNTRY POPULATION PROFILE:

PRESENT POPULATION OF THAILAND ESTIMATED APPROX. 41 MILLION. POP. GROWTH RATE ABOUT 2.8 PERCENT PER ANNUM; CRUDE BIRTH RATE 39 PER 1000; CRUDE DEATH RATE 11 PER 1000. APPROX. 45 PERCENT OF POPULATION UNDER AGE 15. DENSITY 200 PER SQUARE MILE. PER CAPITA INCOME \$210-230. ROUGHLY 82 PERCENT OF POPULATION IS CLASSIFIED AS RURAL. COUNTRY'S URBAN POPULATION HIGHLY CONCENTRATED IN BANGKOK-THONBURI METROPOLIS (POP. 3.2 MILLION), WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR MORE THAN ONE-HALF OF TOTAL POPULATION CLASSIFIED AS URBAN, AND THREE QUARTERS OF POPULATION LIVING IN PLACES OF 20,000 PERSONS OR MORE.

2. TWO POPULATION FACTORS WHICH ARE HAVING A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON SOCIAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN THAILAND ARE INCREASING URBANIZATION (PARTICULARLY IN THE BANGKOK-THONBURI METROPOLIS), AND THE COUNTRY'S VERY YOUNG AGE DISTRIBUTION.

A. URBANIZATION: BANGKOK-THONBURI

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TREND IN THAILAND, AS IN MANY LDC'S, IS TOWARD INCREASING URBANIZATION, WITH RATE OF URBAN GROWTH AVERAGING 5 PERCENT PER YEAR. OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS THE NUMBER OF MODERATE-SIZED PLACES (I.E. 20-100,000 POPULATION) HAS INCREASED FROM 5 TO 40. YET DURING THIS SAME PERIOD GREATER BANGKOK METROPOLIS ACCOUNTED FOR ALMOST TWO-THIRDS OF ALL URBAN POPULATION GROWTH, THUS INCREASING ITS PRIMACY IN THAILAND'S URBAN STRUCTURE. PRESENT POPULATION OF BANGKOK IS 32 TIMES THAT OF NEXT LARGEST CITY, CHIANG MAI, WHICH HAS POPULATION OF 95-100,000. THE POPULATION OF BANGKOK HAS INCREASED TOO FAST FOR THE CITY'S MUNICIPAL SERVICES/TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS AND AVAILABLE HOUSING. WHILE IT WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE CORRECT TO PREDICT--ALONG WITH RECURRING NEWSPAPER EDITORIALISTS--THAT BANGKOK IS ABOUT TO COLLAPSE, IT IS ALSO APPARENT THAT THE METROPOLIS CANNOT MAINTAIN ITS CURRENT GROWTH RATE (IT WILL DOUBLE IN SIZE IN 12-15 YEARS) WITHOUT SEVERE DISLOCATIONS. IN VIEW OF ITS ROLE AS THE HUB OF A VIRTUAL CITY-STATE, THE "CALCUTTA-IZATION" OF BANGKOK COULD HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. THE RTG HAS NOTED THIS PROBLEM AND IS NOW FORMULATING PLANS AND POLICIES TO REDUCE RATE OF GROWTH OF INDUSTRIAL CONCENTRATION IN BANGKOK. SOME SPECIAL FINANCIAL INCENTIVES HAVE BEEN OFFERED FOR INDUSTRIES LOCATING UP COUNTRY BUT RTG RECOGNIZES THAT EFFORT TO DATE INADEQUATE. IBRD, UNDP AND USOM EITHER ARE OR ARE PLANNING/ ADVISORY ASSISTANCE TO RTG IN THIS AREA.

B. AGE DISTRIBUTION

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POPULATION FACTOR LIKELY TO EFFECT THE FUTURE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITION OF THAILAND IS ITS VERY YOUNG AGE DISTRIBUTION. WITH ABOUT 45 PERCENT OF POPULATION 14 YEARS OR YOUNGER NEW ENTRIES TO LABOR FORCE DURING THE NEXT DECADE WOULD RANGE FROM 6.5-8 MILLION. NUMBER OF JOBS MUST INCREASE BY APPROX. 4.7 PERCENT PER ANNUM IF EMPLOYMENT IS TO BE AVAILABLE FOR THOSE SEEKING IT. WITHOUT CONSIDERABLY MORE ATTENTION BEING GIVEN TO EMPLOYMENT PROBLEM THAN IN PAST, EVEN WITH GNP GROWTH RATE ABOVE 6 PERCENT PROSPECTS ARE FOR BOTH GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT AND CONTINUED LOW PRODUCTIVITY PARTICULARLY IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR.

3. OTHER EFFECTS OF RAPID POPULATION GROWTH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A. IN ADDITION, RTG FACES SEVERE STRAINS ON ITS ABILITY TO PROVIDE BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES, EDUCATION AND MEDICAL FACILITIES ALREADY OVER-BURDENED BY EXCESSIVE DEMAND. INsofar AS CURRENT RTG GOVERNMENTAL INSTABILITY AND SOCIAL UNREST ARISE FROM POPULAR DISSATISFACTION WITH INADEQUATE INCOMES, POOR EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS, AND INACCESSABILITY TO EDUCATION AND MEDICAL FACILITIES, WE CAN EXPECT THAT INCREASING PRESSURES CAUSED BY POPULATION

GROWTH WILL EXACERBATE THESE PROBLEMS.

B. IN TERMS OF FOOD SUPPLY THE IMPLICATIONS OF RAPID POPULATION GROWTH ARE NOT SO GRIM--AT LEAST OVER THE NEXT 10-20 YEARS. IT IS LIKELY THAT THAILAND WILL BE ABLE TO FEED ITSELF 20 YEARS FROM NOW WITHOUT RELIANCE ON EXTERNAL (E.G. US) FOOD RESOURCES. CURRENT CROP PRODUCTIVITY PER HECTARE IS VERY LOW--A RESULT OF WIDESCALE SINGLE-CROPPING, USING A MINIMUM OF CAPITAL AND NEW TECHNOLOGY INPUTS. NONETHELESS THAILAND TYPICALLY PRODUCES A SURPLUS OF RICE AND OTHER AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES FOR EXPORT, SUCH THAT AGRICULTURE IS THE COUNTRY'S FOREMOST EARNER OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE. THAILAND HAS THE POTENTIAL, FOR EXAMPLE, TO DOUBLE AND PERHAPS TRIPLE ITS RICE PRODUCTION OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS IF THE RTG WOULD MAKE THE POLICY DECISIONS NECESSARY TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE INCENTIVES TO FARMERS TO PRODUCE AND IF THE RTG WOULD CREATE THE TECHNOLOGY AND THE DELIVERY SYSTEM TO GET IT TO FARMERS, ALONG WITH THE NECESSARY CAPITAL.

C. ONE POSSIBLY DISRUPTIVE CONSEQUENCE OF POPULATION GROWTH IN RURAL THAILAND MAY BE AN INCREASING INCIDENCE OF VERY LOCALIZED CONFLICTS OVER LAND RIGHTS. (LAND AVAILABLE FOR CLEARING FOR FARMING HAS DIMINISHED, AND ESTIMATES ARE THAT LITTLE LAND WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THAILAND FOR CLEARING WITHIN A DECADE.) THIS SITUATION COULD DEVELOP AS POPULATION PRESSURES BUILD UP ON FARM LAND WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN ADEQUATELY SURVEYED OR TITLED. TO DATE, CADASTRAL SURVEYS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED FOR ONLY A LIMITED AREA OF THAILAND, AND ONLY ABOUT 5 PERCENT OF THE FARMERS HAVE NEGOTIABLE TITLES. THE GOVERNMENT IN RESPONSE TO THIS HAS ACCELERATED ITS CADASTRAL SURVEY PROGRAM AND HAS PASSED A LAND CONSOLIDATION LAW AND IS NOW DEBATING IN THE ASSEMBLY A LAND REFORM BILL.

D. TRADE PROSPECTS: INCREASING DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION OF AGRICULTURAL OFFICIAL USE

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TURAL COMMODITIES WITHOUT REALIZATION OF POTENTIAL FOR DRAMATIC PRODUCTION INCREASE WOULD DIMINISH THAILAND'S PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE. THUS RTG IS MAKING EFFORT TO DIVERSIFY BY DEVELOPING SEMI-PROCESSED MATERIALS AND SMALL MANUFACTURES AS MAJOR FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNERS OVER NEXT SEVERAL YEARS, ALONG LINES OF POST-WAR JAPANESE MODEL. FOR U.S. TRADE PROSPECTS THIS WOULD PROBABLY BE A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT, WITH PERHAPS SPECIFIC-COMMODITY DIFFICULTIES (E.G. TEXTILES).

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E. FORESEE LITTLE LIKELIHOOD THAT POPULATION GROWTH IN THAILAND OVER NEXT 10-20 YEARS WILL CONTRIBUTE TO DISRUPTIVE INTERNATIONAL BEHAVIOR IN WAYS OF CONCERN TO U.S. OR TO THAILAND'S NEIGHBORS IN SEA REGION. DO EXPECT, HOWEVER, THAT SLOW PACE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUPLED WITH CONSEQUENCES OF POPULATION GROWTH (E.G. TWICE AS MANY PEOPLE PRODUCING TWICE AS MUCH RICE ON ROUGHLY SAME AMOUNT OF LAND) COULD GIVE RISE TO SITUATION OF STATIC OR DECLINING REAL INCOME AND LITTLE OPPORTUNITY FOR UPWARD SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC MOBILITY. A LARGE RURAL POPULATION IN THIS CONDITION COULD CONCEIVABLY PROVIDE A RECEPTIVE MATRIX FOR EXPANSION OF THAILAND'S TROUBLESOME INSURRECTIONIST MOVEMENT. SIMILARLY, CONTINUED RAPID URBANIZATION--FED INCREASINGLY BY A RURAL "PUSH" PHENOMENON--COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE GROWTH OF AN INCREASINGLY FRUSTRATED AND VOLATILE URBAN POPULATION IF SUFFICIENT NEW EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARE LACKING. AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT HAS IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN NEXT DECADE IN ADDRESSING THESE PROBLEMS.

F. REQUIREMENTS FOR RTG INVESTMENTS IN SOCIAL OVERHEAD--PARTICULARLY EDUCATION AND HEALTH--EXPECTED TO INCREASE SUBSTANTIALLY AS RESULT OF POPULATION GROWTH OVER NEXT 10-20 YEARS. RTG NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD--(GOVERNMENT PLANNING COMMISSION) HAS CONDUCTED ANALYSIS OF COST/PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS THESE TWO AREAS UNDER VARYING POPULATION GROWTH ASSUMPTIONS. BOARD ALSO PROJECTED COSTS OF FAMILY

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PLANNING PROGRAM OVER SAME PERIOD AND CONCLUDED THAT SAVINGS

ALONE IN THESE SECTORS (DUE TO BIRTHS PREVENTED) COULD TOTAL TWO TO FOUR TIMES COST OF THE FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM.

4. U.S./ OTHER DONOR MEASURES

A. U.S. BI-LATERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: THE IMMEDIATE NEED IN THAILAND IS FOR EXPANSION OF AVAILABILITY OF FAMILY PLANNING INFORMATION AND SERVICES. OTHER NATIONAL BI-LATERAL PROGRAMS ARE NOT PREPARED TO MAKE THE SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS NEEDED HERE TO SUPPLY CONTRACEPTIVES ON A LARGE SCALE OR TO SUPPORT EXPANSION OF THE HEALTH/FAMILY PLANNING DELIVERY SYSTEM. CONSEQUENTLY THE U.S. IS NOW AND IS LIKELY TO BE FOR THE NEXT 3-4 YERS, THE ONLY BI-LATERAL DONOR IN A POSITION TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN THIS CRITICAL AREA. THE UNFPA, THRU VARIOUS U.N. IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES, ALSO PROVIDES SUPPORT TO THE FAMILY PLANNING DELIVERY SYSTEM BUT ON A RELATIVELY MODEST SCALE VIS THAI REQUIREMENTS. (CURRENT UNFPA PROGRAM IS \$4 MILLION OVER THREE YEAR PERIOD 1972-1974). A VERY SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN UN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HERE COULD OBTAIN NEED FOR SOME ELEMENTS OF U.S. BI-LATERAL PROGRAM (E.G. CONTRACEPTIVES, VEHICLES, MEDICAL COMMODITIES), BUT U.N. PRACTICE OF PROVIDING ASSISTANCE IN CONTEXT OF MULTI-YEAR U.N. PLANS PROVIDES VERY LITTLE FLEXIBILITY OF RESPONSE TO NEW PROGRAM DEVELOPMENTS.

B. IN ADDITION TO CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT FAMILY PLANNING DELIVERY SYSTEM, BELIEVE U.S. PROGRAM SHOULD ALSO PAY INCREASED ATTENTION TO UNDERLYING SOCIAL/ECONOMIC FORCES AFFECTING FERTILITY BEHAVIOR IN LDC'S. THIS IS TO SAY THAT EVEN WIDESCALE AVAILABILITY OF CONTRACEPTIVES AND CLINICAL FAMILY PLANNING METHODS CANNOT BY ITSELF CAUSE SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN FERTILITY IF MOST PEOPLE CONTINUE TO DESIRE MANY CHILDREN. U.S. SHOULD CONSIDER ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS WHICH AFFECT THOSE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FACTORS HAVING HIGH CORRELATION (I.E. ASSUMED CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP) TO FERTILITY. THUS, EFFORTS TO PROMOTE INCREASED FEMALE OCCUPATION, LITERACY, MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH, NUTRITION AND SIMILAR PROGRAMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED VALID AREAS OF POPULATION PROGRAM ASSISTANCE IN CASES WHERE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP TO FERTILITY BEHAVIOR CAN BE DEMONSTRATED. MORE ATTENTION HAS TO BE GIVEN ALSO TO EXPANDING ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE IN RURAL THAILAND.

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C. BELIEVE U.N. SHOULD CONTINUE ITS ROLE AS PRIMARY FORUM FOR DISCUSSION OF POPULATION PROBLEMS AND AS IMPARTIAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR GOVERNMENT LEADERS. ALSO RECOMMEND THAT WORLD BANK TAKE MORE ASSERTIVE POSITION ON SPECIFIC COUNTRIES' EFFORTS TO CURB RAPID POPULATION GROWTH INsofar AS SUCH GROWTH UNDERMINES DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL AND THUS EFFICACY OF PROPOSED WORLD BANK GRANT/LOAN CONTRIBUTIONS OR CONTRIBUTIONS OF COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING IN IBRD-CHAIRED CONSORTIA.

5. RTG ATTITUDE: RTG LEADERSHIP IS IN GENERAL AMBIVALENT ABOUT POPULATION GROWTH SITUATION IN THAILAND. THIS INDIFFERENCE RESULT OF 1) LONG PRO-NATALIST TRADITION (BABY BONUSES WERE PROVIDED UP TO 1956); 2) POSITION OF FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT, WHO FAVORED LARGE POPULATION TO REDUCE THREAT OF CHINESE INVASION; AND 3) GENERAL INERTIA RTG BUREAUCRACY IN ABSENCE OF APPARANT EMERGENCY OR CRISIS SITUATION. LONG-TERM PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUED SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD SUPPORTS THIS RTG COMPLACENCY. CERTAIN ELEMENTS IN RTG LEADERSHIP, HOWEVER, VERY COGNIZANT OF LONG-RANGE IMPLICATIONS RAPID POPULATION GROWTH, ARE ACTIVELY PROMOTING EXPANSION OF FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM, AND HAVE INDICATED WILLINGNESS EXPLORE "BEYOND FAMILY PLANNING" PROGRAMS FEASIBLE IN THAILAND. MINISTER AND DEPUTY MINISTER OF HEALTH, DIRECTOR AND SENIOR STAFF OF NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED. CASE BEING MADE BY THESE PERSONS WITHIN RTG CAN BE STRENGTHENED BY CONTINUED U.S. AND OTHER DONOR SUPPORT FOR EXPANSION FAMILY PLANNING/POPULATION PROGRAMS, AND FOR IMPROVEMENT OF RTG ANALYTIC CAPABILITIES TO ASSESS TRENDS AND CONSEQUENCES OF POPULATION GROWTH. KINTNER

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